



United States Department of the Interior



U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, Montana 59404-6133

September 10, 2010

NWRS/BL/PU 5
Mail Stop 61510

Memorandum

To: Thomas Roffe, Chief Wildlife Health, R6, FWS, Bozeman, MT

From: Vanessa Fields, Wildlife Biologist, Benton Lake NWR

Subject: Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Accomplishment Report, FY-2010

Background

The Benton Lake Complex encompasses 127,000 acres across north-central and northwestern Montana. This proposal is for the eastern portion of the Complex, including the Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, located 12 miles north of Great Falls, and 22 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) located throughout the 10 county Benton Lake Wetland Management District (WMD). The refuge is 12,383 total acres including 6700 acres of mixed-grass prairie and 5600 acres of wetlands. The total deer population (mule and white-tailed deer) on the refuge, which is closed to big game hunting, is less than 100 animals. An occasional elk is seen on the refuge.

The Benton Lake complex has a relatively low to moderate risk of significant Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). This assessment is based on the relatively low numbers of deer on the refuge and WPAs and the fact that deer freely move on and off Service lands. There have been no relocations of elk or deer on or near Service lands in the last 5 years. The only confirmed case of CWD in Montana was found in a captive elk herd near Philipsburg (Montana Dept. of Livestock 2004), which is approximately 50 miles from the Powell County WPAs. The closest game farm to the refuge is 25 miles.

Our CWD planning and management goals and objectives for Benton Lake complex include:

Management Goal: In collaboration with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, prevent the establishment of CWD in wild cervids that use the Refuge or WPAs

Surveillance Goal: Early detection of CWD to increase the probability of eliminating or controlling the spread of the disease.

Surveillance Objectives: To determine the status of CWD in deer and elk on the Refuge and in the WMD and estimate the likelihood that CWD is absent.

Methods

Regular surveillance is conducted for CWD on the refuge. Refuge staff drive an established monitoring route 1-2 times per week to look for any deer or elk that exhibit symptoms of CWD (emaciation, drooling, staggering) or carcasses that could be submitted for sampling. The date, start time, and weather conditions are recorded before each route. The number and species of all ungulates observed during the route are recorded, as well as their general condition.

Due to the remote location of many Service lands within the Wetland Management District, staff conduct opportunistic surveillance for sick or dead ungulates in conjunction with other job related visits to these units.

If deer or elk are observed exhibiting clinical signs consistent with CWD (emaciation, drooling, staggering, indifferent to surroundings) these animals will be collected and the heads removed and submitted to the MTFWP lab in Bozeman or the diagnostic lab at Colorado State University (CSU). If freshly dead animals are located, the heads from these animals are collected and submitted to the Bozeman or CSU lab as well. Collection methods and safety measures were described in the CWD Plan for Benton Lake Complex (USFWS 2004).

FY 2010 Surveillance Results

During FY2010, there were 1,308 white-tailed deer and one mule deer observation on the refuge (Figure 1). All of the animals appeared to be healthy and did not exhibit any symptoms of CWD. In addition, no deer or elk have been seen exhibiting symptoms of CWD through opportunistic observations by refuge staff. Adverse weather and snow drifts along the surveillance route made it impossible to run the route for several weeks during the winter. In addition, WMD staff did not observe any deer or elk with clinical signs consistent with CWD during routine work on the district this year.

In FY2010, no hunter-killed animals or opportunistic mortalities were available for testing.

Discussion

A database was created to record all of the surveillance observations and specimens collected. GIS layers have been created from these datasets. Copies of the database have been submitted with this report and will be submitted to the state of Montana at the end of the fiscal year.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks finalized their CWD plan in June 2006. (MTFWP 2006). Following internal review of the draft EA and review of the public comments received by the department, MTFWP has selected a management plan that incorporates elements of two alternatives from the draft CWD Management Plan. If CWD is detected in Montana, the final decision on specific management of CWD at the diagnosed epicenter will be made by an epidemiologic team (epi-team) and based on the variables that the situation presents. Management will be initiated through the radio collaring of 50 animals and a determination of the home range of that set of animals through monitoring by radio-telemetry for 6-9 months. During that initial time period, the epi-team will use all on the ground information available to select a management action that best fits the situation. The epi-team will also develop any mitigation measures at that time necessary to reduce effects of the management plan on the environment. We will continue to coordinate with MTFWP to assist and coordinate in the implementation of the final plan. Our contact in the local MTFWP office is Cory Loecker.

Refuge and WMD staff that interact with hunters are prepared to provide information about Refuge surveillance goals, the status of CWD in Montana, facts concerning CWD transmission, and the potential risk involved.

Budget :

FY2010			
Personnel time	Rate	Hrs*	Total
GS-12 Biologist	44.00	50	2200.00
GS-6 Technician	18.00	102	1836.00
		sub-total	4036.00
Fuel	Miles/route	Cost/route	Total
63 routes total for year	20	3.00	189.00
Supplies		#kits	Total
CWD kits (new)	0	0	0.00
Misc. re-supply			200.00
Specimen analysis	heads	Cost/test + shipping	Total
	0	100	0
		Total Requested	6118.00
		Total Spent	4425.00

*GS-12 = 13 routes/yr @ 2hr/route + 24hrs report writing and data stewardship
 GS-6 = 51 routes/yr @ 2hr/route

We were able to hire a bio-technician during the winter this year who also ran the CWD route. This resulted in a salary savings of \$1172.00. In addition, we did not have any heads to send in for testing. Therefore, we requested \$6,118.00 based on our project proposal, but only spent \$4425.00 on FY2010 CWD surveillance activities.

References

Montana Department of Livestock. 2004. CWD information from Montana Department of Livestock. [URL:http://www.liv.state.mt.us](http://www.liv.state.mt.us).

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. 2006. Decision Notice: Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan for Free Ranging Wildlife in Montana. Helena, MT. 16pp.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. 2005. Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan for Free-ranging Wildlife in Montana. Helena, MT. 89p

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2004. Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance and Monitoring Plan for Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex. 16

cc:Kathleen Burchett,Robert Johnson

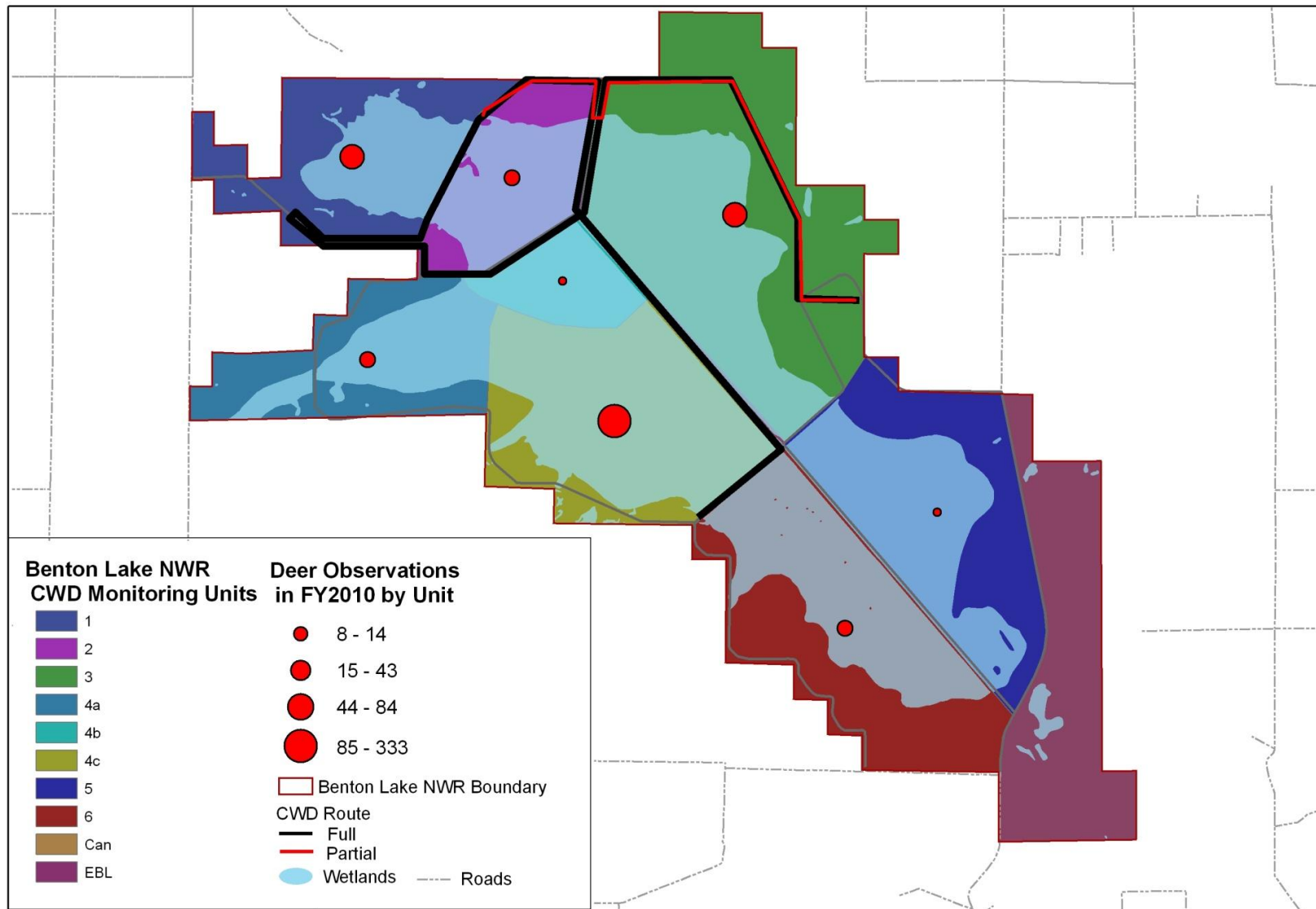
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Figure 1. Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance:
Total deer observations FY2010



Produced for the Benton Lake Complex
Current to: 09/13/2010
Basemap date: September 2010
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0 0.3 0.6 1.2 1.8 2.4 Miles

